

Tragedy

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Whether directly or indirectly, every Sigonellan has had a personal involvement in the recent tragedy involving HC-4. And although you may not personally know a member of the aircrew, chances are you have a friend or coworker who does or was somehow involved in the rescue response. The fact is, when one member of the family suffers, the whole family suffers.

When extraordinary unplanned events overtake daily routines, or worse, take loved ones away, it can seem impossible to reestablish life's balance. Things just don't make sense and there is a limit to what the mind can process. For example, consider the times when a telephone call hasn't gone through. Generally, it's at a peak time. There is simply too much information for the phone company's resources. In a similar manner, coping with intense stress and meeting life's daily activities can overload the body's circuit boards.

When these limits are exceeded, the body makes a choice: deal with the pain and stress or continue with the here and now. It's not always possible to do both well. How does the body react or signal that it's over tasked?

Sleep is often poor. Some people have trouble getting to sleep or may not wake up refreshed. Dreams can be vivid and disturbing as the mind attempts to put some order to chaos. Flashbacks can occur as well. Concentration may be affected and it can be difficult to focus. It's not unusual for appetites to decrease or to experience palpitations, fast heartbeat or irregular beating heart. Many people note increased irritability or may be on edge. Stress signals that last more than a few weeks can indicate that professional help may be beneficial.

It's important to realize that not everyone experiences these stress signals. Everyone is different and has a different threshold for stress. In fact, the same stress will influence an individual differently based on circumstances. Individuals also differ in what stresses them. It's common to have delayed stress signals as well. Once the initial rush is over, there is enough time and energy to reflect on what has happened.

While stress signals are individualized, there are some general actions that can be used to get back on track. In short, make sure to take care of yourself.

-Sleep is critical, so limit caffeine and tobacco.

- Drink in moderation. Alcohol distorts sleep patterns.
- Eat healthy. Now isn't the time to go on a diet.
- Moderate exercise improves sleep and reduces stress.
- Talk with others who share your experience.
- Resume routines. Normalizing daily activities keeps the mind from dwelling on negative thoughts.

If you or a shipmate are having trouble resolving stress signals, please contact the Family Service Center, a Chaplain, or Medical. It may take time, but life will get better.